

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting the Annual Certification of the Nuclear Weapons Stockpile February 11, 1998

Dear _____:

In my September 22, 1997, message to the Senate transmitting the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) for advice and consent to ratification, I announced that I would provide to the appropriate committees of Congress the annual certification of the nuclear weapons stockpile by the Secretaries of Defense and Energy and accompanying report. Attached is a copy of that certification and report.

I am pleased to note the Secretaries' conclusion that the nuclear stockpile has no safety or reliability concerns that require underground testing at this time. Problems that have arisen in the stockpile are being addressed and resolved without underground nuclear testing to ensure the stockpile remains safe and reliable. In reaching this conclusion, the Secretaries obtained the advice of the Directors of the National Weapons Laboratories, the Commander in Chief, United States Strategic Command, and the Nuclear Weapons Council.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate; President pro tempore of the Senate Strom Thurmond, chairman, and Carl Levin, ranking member, Senate Committee on Armed Services; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader; Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Richard A. Gephardt, House minority leader; Jesse Helms, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Benjamin A. Gilman, chairman, and Lee Hamilton, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; and Floyd Spence, chairman, and Ike Skelton, ranking member, House Committee on National Security. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 12.

Remarks to the Joint Democratic Caucus February 12, 1998

Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, the minute I get back to the White House I am going to sign an Executive order mandating the widest possible dissemination, for free, of whatever it is the Vice President had for breakfast this morning. *[Laughter]* Thank you, Mr. Vice President, for what you said and for all the work you have done over these last 5-plus years to help make our country a better place.

I want to thank Dick Gephardt and Tom Daschle, the Members of the Senate and the House who are here, the members of our team, Mr. Bowles and others. I want to thank Barbara Turner and Judith Lee and Kate Casey for reminding us of why we're all here.

You know, I—as we have established in painful and sometimes happy ways over the last 5 years, I'm not exactly a Washington person, you know. I just sort of showed up here a few years

ago for work. *[Laughter]* And sometimes I really get lonesome for why I came here. You can go for days, weeks here, and hardly ever spot a real citizen. *[Laughter]* I mean somebody that's just out there living, trying to do the right thing, showing up every day, trying to make this country a better place by making their lives and their families and their workplaces and their communities better places.

These women reminded us today of why we are all here, what our charge is, why we are here. And we should draw two lessons from what they all said. Number one, we should never, ever, ever believe that what we're doing here does not make a difference and is just some personal power trip or some political party's power trip. That is not true. What we do here makes a difference, and you've just heard it. The second lesson we should draw is that

we shouldn't spend too much time patting ourselves on the back because we still have a lot more to do to make this country what it ought to be in this new century. And they gave us that. And for me, it was a real jolt of adrenalin, and it touched my heart and engaged my mind, and I know you all felt the same way. And I think we should give them another hand. Thank you very much. [Applause] Thank you.

Let me just say to all of you, I am very proud to be a member of the oldest political party in this country, and maybe in any free democracy. I am proud to work with all of you not only to strengthen that party but, more importantly, to make our country a better place. I want to say a little bit more about the Democratic Party at the end of my remarks, but I'd like to say a couple of words about our leaders, Dick Gephardt and Tom Daschle. And I could say many things about both of them, but two things strike me because they, in different ways, reflect them at their moment of greatest challenge.

In 1993 and 1994, we were in the majority, all right, but Dick Gephardt knew that we were risking that majority by having to pass a Democrats-only budget and passing a crime bill which, along with the Brady bill, not only put more police on the street but took more guns off the street and out of the hands of people who shouldn't have them. And he was well aware that, if we did those things, the problem for the House was they had to run every 2 years and that we would be doing the right thing, but people would not be able to feel the right thing by the next election, but they could hear all the fears—"the Democrats are taking your guns away; the Democrats are taxing you"—all things that were wrong. But he did it anyway.

And by the narrowest of margins, we prevailed on the budget; by a very narrow margin, we prevailed on the crime bill. The crime bill was written, in effect, by police officers and community anticrime activists. And 5 years later we're going to have a balanced budget, and we've got safer streets, and there are all kinds of people like the three women who talked here today who have different stories to tell because Dick Gephardt did the right thing when it was required. And I appreciate that.

Now, consider Tom Daschle's plight: He becomes the Senate Democratic leader when we're in the minority, and he has to deal with the almost unbelievable roll of bad luck—because,

you know, a third of the Senate comes up every year—that even though we're now in the majority, we have two more elections where we have more people running than they do. You couldn't—no mathematical statistician could sit down and figure out a bigger nightmare for a party.

Now, you go into the minority for the first time in a while, and by the way, you've got two more elections where you have to put more people up to bat than they do. They'll have more money, but you've got to have more candidates. And, oh, by the way, you have to show up for work tomorrow and figure out how to get something done for the American people consistent with what your members believe in and consistent with what you know is in the interest of the American people.

But he did it. I defy you to find a time in the last 20 years when more Democratic ideas have made their way into the lifeblood of America than they have through the balanced budget, raising the minimum wage, and the other things that were done. Many of them came right out of Senate Democratic ideas, in no small measure because Tom Daschle proved that he could stand up for our party and reach out a constructive hand to the other party and get something done for the American people. And I thank him for that.

We have taken our party in a new direction for the 21st century to help our country go in a new direction, a new direction rooted in the future, not the past, bound by fiscal discipline but unlimited in imagination and dreams and hopes for our people, determined to invest in their future, grounded in our traditional values.

We've shaped a new kind of Government, as the Vice President said. It is leaner. It's more flexible. It's a catalyst for new ideas. It's determined to give the American people the tools they need to solve their problems and make the most of their own lives. It may be the smallest Government in 35 years, but in many ways it is more progressive because of all the things we are trying to do. And it is giving us a stronger nation.

You know, of course, that we have the lowest unemployment in 24 years. And I think it's important to say, because of what we care about, we have rising incomes again, and we have diminishing inequality. Child poverty is now lower

than it was in 1989 at the top of the last recovery. Why? Because of the earned-income tax credit that these Democratic caucuses insisted on, saying "We are not going to tax hard-working people who do go out there and work full-time. We're not going to use the tax system to put them into poverty. We're going to use the tax system to lift them out of poverty so their children can have a dignified and successful childhood." And I thank you for that.

So what we're doing is working, but what the American people want us to do is to keep showing up for work—to spend precious little time celebrating what has been done. That's what we got hired to do. I remember one time when I was thinking about running for a fifth term as Governor, and I went out to the State Fair. I used to have Governor's Day at the State Fair. And this old boy showed up in overalls to the booth where I was sitting there talking to people. And he said, "Well, Bill, you going to run again?" And I said, "I don't know, I might." I said, "If I do, will you vote for me?" He said, "Yeah, I will. I always have." But he said, "I don't know if you can win." He said, "You've been in an awful long time." But he said, "I'll vote for you." And I said, "Well, don't you think I've done a good job?" He said, "Well, of course, but that's what we hired you to do." [Laughter] He said, "You picked up a paycheck every 2 weeks, didn't you?" [Laughter] We should all remember that.

Our citizens are focused on the future, in their own lives and in our lives. And we're here today not to talk about the past but to talk about that future. We're here today not to talk about the positions our party seeks to take against the Republicans in Congress but the positions our party seeks to advance in the debate with the hope that we can write them into law and change the lives and the futures of the American people, so we can have more stories like the three we heard from these distinguished Americans today.

Now, most of this has been talked about, but let me say the things that I think are most important and what I hope will be our common agenda. First of all, we've got to stay the path of fiscal discipline. We've got to stay the path, because the reason this economy is booming is that it's clear that we are serious about running a disciplined shop here. And we've got interest rates down, investment up; it's creating

jobs, almost 15 million new jobs. We can't back off of that.

If I had told anybody, any economist, 5 years ago, "Look, 5 years from now we'll have 14.7 million new jobs, an unemployment rate for months on end under 5 percent, and the lowest inflation in 30 years, and the highest homeownership rate in 30 years, the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate on record, the lowest black unemployment rate in nearly 3 decades," they would have said that I needed to see someone for my sense of reality. That has all happened because we began first with discipline, and we dare not abandon it.

Now, that means, among other things, we have to recognize that this balanced budget which is about to happen will maintain itself for many years, but only because of the high receipts we're getting from Social Security taxes, and yet Social Security is not all right for the long run. That's why we have to say as a party, before we spend any of this surplus, even a penny of it, we ought to have a commitment and a plan that we will implement to save Social Security first.

The baby boom generation, when we retire, there will be less than three people working for a every one person drawing. Sometime in the middle of the next century, in about the, oh, fourth decade of the next century, there will be only two people working for one person drawing, if present retirement rates and work force participation rates continue.

I am the oldest of the baby boomers. I can tell you, all of my friends at home—I'm talking about my middle class friends, people that—even people that didn't have a college degree or anything—they're all worried about, number one, will they have a retirement, and number two, if they have one, will it be so costly to our children that their ability to raise our grandchildren will be compromised. None of us want that. None of us need that. That would be a wrong result. And we must save Social Security in a way that binds us together across the generations and across our income differences, instead of tearing us apart. So we must say as a party, we want to save Social Security first.

Now, Judith pointed out she had a 401(k) plan. I'm really proud of a lot of the work we've done in this Congress, going back to '94, to stabilize and save private pensions and to make it easier for people to take out their own private

retirement. That must be a part of this. Whatever we do with Social Security, most people won't be able to maintain their living standard on it. And that's good, because they've got a higher living standard. But that means we have to do more to enable people to save for their own retirement. We have to make it easier. We have to make it more secure. We have to make them more options. We have to tailor the plans to the economy that they're living in, not the one that existed 10 or 20 years ago.

The second thing we have to do is to do more to preserve the quality of health care. This has already been mentioned by the previous leaders, but I want to say I think it's imperative that the Democratic Party work in this Congress to actually pass—and there are members of the Republican Party who want to do this with us; this need not be a partisan issue. We ought to pass a consumer bill of rights that establishes baseline protection for people.

We have 160 million Americans in managed care plans now. They ought to be entitled to the benefits of those plans without giving up quality health care and the right to have a doctor make the best prescription for them. We ought to pass it, and we ought to work and work and work until it becomes the law of the land.

We are now working, we in the administration, to implement the law that you passed, that you generated out of this caucus, to extend health care coverage to 5 million more children. And that will be very important. Child poverty is down in the last 5 years. Visits to the doctor are up in the last 5 years. That is good. But we also have to recognize there are a lot of other populations that still don't have health insurance. And people between the ages of 55 and 65, people who lost their jobs and can't get hired again, people who retired early and were promised health coverage but their companies broke the promise, people who have a spouse that's old enough for Medicare, and they're not, and they're ill—those people—all we want to do is let them buy into the Medicare program.

Now, there are some who say, well, they can't afford it—\$300 a month. I'll tell you what: That's a lot of money; it's a lot less than one trip to the hospital. One trip to the hospital will cost them 3 times as much as the annual premium will.

Secondly, we cannot afford to do anything that undermines the stability of the Medicare fund. We've got a Medicare Commission—thank you, Senator Breaux—that's going to try to figure out what to do about the long-term financial problems of Medicare. So we have to let people buy in in a way that doesn't affect the stability of the fund. A lot of these people have children who will help them pay these premiums. They may have brothers and sisters who will help them pay these premiums. What have we got to lose by trying? It is wrong to leave all these people out there between 55 and 65 at a vulnerable time, when we can simply give them the option to pay into the fund at the real cost in a way that will not upset the stability of the Medicare Trust Fund. I implore you to get behind that, and let's pass it for the benefit of the people.

We have a great agenda. We have to finish hooking up every classroom—a great agenda for education—we have to finish hooking up every classroom to the information superhighway. We have to finish our work to raise standards and have these basic exams in the basics. We are offering now—I seek, at least, to offer new options for schools to follow the Chicago model, not just to end social promotion but to give all these kids that are being left behind there an actual chance to learn and the tools with which they can learn.

But perhaps the two most important things we have proposed that I hope all of us will be united behind, are the idea of putting 100,000 teachers out there to lower our average class sizes in the first 3 grades to 18 kids a class, and then helping either build or repair classrooms in 5,000 more schools, so we can actually lower class size, improve the physical conditions, and improve education in those early grades. It will make a dramatic difference to American education, and I hope that we will be out there fighting for that.

Lastly, let me say I want to join the chorus of those who believe we should raise the minimum wage. Now, every time we have raised the minimum wage in my lifetime there have been those who say, "If you do this, it will cost jobs." The last time we did it, it didn't cost jobs. We continued to create jobs at a very brisk pace. But we know that the real value of the minimum wage today is actually less than it was 20 years ago. We know that.

We know that there is a limit to how much we can do with the earned-income tax credit, in terms of giving people back money through the tax system to lift working people and their kids out of poverty, without running a risk of having the system abused and having people take advantage of it. But we know if people just get a fair wage for the work they do, they're not going to get paid if they don't do the work.

So I believe it's time to raise it again. And again I say, with our economy the strongest in a generation, our prospects bright, but with our efforts to overcome 20 years of increasing inequality among working people just beginning to take hold, I think we should raise it again, by a dollar in two equal steps by the turn of the century. That will raise the living standards of 12 million hard-working Americans.

I thank Senator Kennedy. I thank you, Congressman Bonior, for your leadership on this. I think we ought to reach out a hand just like we did before. We raised the minimum wage once in this Congress. We can do it again, and the economy will support it. We just have to look at the statistic of what's happened to these working families over the last 20 years, and let's just simply say—we say we favor work over welfare; we've set up a system to promote that; now, if people are going to show up for work, they ought to be able to raise their children in dignity. And we ought to say this. *[Applause]* So—thank you. Save Social Security first; establish the Patients' Bill of Rights; let people buy into Medicare; reduce average class size and build more schools and schoolrooms; raise the minimum wage.

I also want to associate myself with what has already been said and with the proposals I've already made on child care, on campaign finance, on the tobacco legislation, on environmental protection, and medical and other research, on making our streets safer by passing the funds I've asked for through the Justice Department and the Education Department to keep these schools open late hours. All these kids that are getting in trouble, a bunch of them will never get in trouble in the first place if you give them something positive to do after school and before the parents get home from work. I hope you will pass the community empowerment initiative to bring free enterprise and jobs and investment to poor neighborhoods in urban areas and rural areas where it still hasn't reached. We have a lot of other things to do.

And let me just say this. You know the American people agree with this agenda because you saw the response to the State of the Union. I urge all of us to resist the temptation to have the whole agenda to take to them next November. Let's pass every bit of it we can into law. Let's make every bit of it we can real in the lives of our people. Believe me, we have enough honest disagreements with our friends in the Republican Party that some of this agenda is going to be left for us to take to the American people in November and debate about it. You know that. If they make their best efforts to honestly work with us based on what they really believe, and we make our best efforts to honestly work with them based on what we really believe, there will be some things left on the table next November that we can probably go to the electorate with. And we don't have to be ashamed of that.

But we owe it to our people to make sure that if any of these things that could become law and could change their lives and could make more stories like these three we've heard—that if it doesn't happen this year, we owe it to the American people to make sure that it is not our fault, that we showed up and we did the work here. We owe it to them.

What is the purpose of a political party? I spent a lot of time last year reading about the 19th century and about places in the 1800's, periods of time that most Americans don't know much about anymore. I've spent a lot of time studying the history of our party. I believe the purpose of our Government and, therefore, the purpose of any political party, at every important period in our history, if you look back through it, has been threefold: to widen the circle of opportunity, to deepen the meaning of freedom, and to unify the Nation.

Now, that's what Thomas Jefferson did with the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, and then became President, and he bought Louisiana—thank you very much, that put Arkansas in the Union—*[laughter]*—and sent Lewis and Clark out west. Right? Widened opportunity, deepened freedom, unified the country.

Now, any honest Democrat will say that the Republicans did more of that than we did from Abraham Lincoln through Theodore Roosevelt. And frankly, I'm sure we had a lot of nice people in our party during a lot of that period, but they were asleep at the switch. But from

Woodrow Wilson to Franklin Roosevelt to Harry Truman to John Kennedy to Lyndon Johnson to Jimmy Carter to the present day, through all of our leadership in Congress in the 20th century forward, our party—we haven't always been right; we haven't always been up to date; but we have always been for widening the circle of opportunity, deepening the meaning of liberty and freedom, and uniting and strengthening the United States of America. That is what we ought to be about here. That is what we ought to

be about. And if we do it, the American people will respond.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:28 a.m. in the Dirksen Senate Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Barbara Turner, founder, Boscart Construction Co., Inc., and Washington, DC, chair, Women's Leadership Forum; Judith Lee, comptroller, Older Women's League; and Kate Casey, student, Trinity College, Washington, DC.

Statement on the United States District Court Decision on the Line Item Veto

February 12, 1998

The line item veto provides an important tool for the President to strike unnecessary spending and tax items from legislation. Congress took the correct step giving the President this authority, and I was pleased to sign the line item veto into law. It has worked well, saving the

American taxpayers more than \$1 billion already. Although I am disappointed with today's ruling, it is my belief that, ultimately, the line item veto will be ruled constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Message on the Observance of Presidents' Day, 1998

February 12, 1998

Warm greetings to all Americans as we observe Presidents' Day, 1998.

On this day we remember with pride the history of the American Presidency and the achievements of the many extraordinary leaders who have guided our nation's course over the past two centuries. Each President in his own time has faced unique challenges in striving to fulfill the purpose of our Constitution "to form a more perfect Union."

For George Washington, that challenge meant sustaining and strengthening the fragile Union he had helped to establish. During the eight years of his Presidency, he carried out the awesome responsibilities of his office with such care and wisdom that he confirmed the trust of his fellow Americans and proved to a watching world that our new republic would survive and flourish.

Abraham Lincoln's great challenge was to preserve the Union. Taking the oath of office after

seven states had already seceded, President Lincoln resolved to keep our country united, even at the cost of civil war. With courage and tenacity, he led America through four years of bloody conflict and, in victory, reached out to begin the healing that would bring us together again as one nation. "With malice toward none," he said less than two months before his death, "with charity for all . . . let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds . . . to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace . . ."

Today we face our own challenge to build a more perfect Union, a Union that must now be forged from one of history's most racially and culturally diverse societies. We can do so by widening the circle of opportunity for all our people: opportunity for a good education, opportunity for good jobs, opportunity to reach our own great potential. If we do so, we will